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ABSTRACT

Culture is a powerful force that may affect the reception and acceptance of communication. To determine if culture has an effect on perceived speaker effectiveness, students in one introductory speech communication class in a Florida university and a variety of courses in a university in the Bahamas, were given an 80-item questionnaire that was designed to assess the source of creditiblity of the "best imagined speaker" and to assess a variety of content and delivery variables deemed important to effective public speaking style. Further, data were compared across three cultural groups--Bahamian, Latin American, and Anglo. The primary conclusion drawn from the study was that the speaker perception scales need further refinement. The second conclusion was that Anglos and Latin Americans exhibit essentially the same expectations of a public speaker. There were no significant differences between the perceptions of the "best imagined speaker" of the Anglo and Latin American respondents. Regardless of culture, public speakers should attempt to be dynamic in their delivery and to develop some feeling of association and identification between themselves and their audience members. In addition, speakers should attempt to plan their speeches well, with a well-organized and easy-to-follow pattern of organization. (HOD)

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AN INVESTIGATION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED SPEAKER EFFECTIVENESS

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AN INVESTIGATION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN
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Public speaking literature continually reminds us that adaptation of a speech to situation and audience is an important criterion of success in public speaking. We are also cautioned that different audiences and situations require different approaches and styles; what may be appropriate language and delivery for one group or culture may be clearly inappropriate for another. Chu (1964) noted that culture is a powerful force which may affect the reception and acceptance of communication. He hypothesized, for example, that in cultures which stress submission to authority, a persuasive strategy which presents a clear cut one-sided message would be more likely to be accepted, while a two-sided message would cause confusion and doubt. Oliver (1974), in an essay on Asian and comparative public address, observed that "...the needs of peoples in various communities being different, there will inevitably be differences in what speakers in various cultures will recommend as practical policies" (p. 104). In a study of the influence of sociocultural variables on performance in public speaking classes Conville and Story (1972) determined that sociocultural factors are powerful predictors of grades in public speaking classes which led them to the conclusion that "... a good deal of what is taught in (public speaking) courses ... may simply be the communication conventions, the sociolinguistic rules, followed by or esteemed by those who teach the courses... (T)he data indicate that many students are being expected to perform communication behaviors foreign to their backgrounds while many other students' accustomed communication behaviors are being expected of

them: at best, an inequitable situation, one fostered by a failure to welcome a variety of communication competencies into the applied communication course. Many students' backgrounds apparently make it impossible for them to conform to textbook/instructor expectations..." (p. 246). An implication noted by Conville and Story is that "...we may have to jettison the notion of a generally applicable applied communication course, since such a course will almost inevitably reflect the sociocultural bias of the delivery system" (p. 247).

In 1967 Baker (1967) observed that little had been published on behavioral objectives in speech courses. Since that time literature on behavioral objectives and competency-based speech education has proliferated. While studies in this area consistently include the importance of adjusting ideas and presentation to listeners (Littlefield, 1975; Gruner, 1968; Staton-Spicer and Bassett, 1980; Black and Martin, 1980), there have been few published studies which indicate the nature of the cultural biases to which speakers should adapt. Clearly such information is essential if the public speaking course is to prepare students to speak before cultural groups other than their own. The present study was a beginning exploration into the nature of cultural biases toward speaker effectiveness.

The study was inspired by observations made by the authors while teaching public speaking classes in Nassau, Bahamas. The Bahamian students, most of whom were public school teachers and administrators, were highly motivated, cooperative and eager to learn. They were, however, extremely reluctant to adopt the "direct, personal, conversational style" advocated by their textbook and their instructors. In

class discussions it was determined that such a style violated their expectations of a public speaker. There was a general feeling that a public speaker should "present himself formally in most situations;" that he should "set himself apart from his audience;" that he should present himself as "an authority on his subject" and "command the utmost respect."

This raised an interesting question: In teaching students to be direct, personal, and conversational in their public speaking style, are we perhaps doing them a disservice if they will be returning to cultural settings in which other norms are operative? Furthermore, if there are differences in cultural norms regarding the role of "speaker" shouldn't knowledge of such differences be an integral part of audience analysis and our adaptation of the speech to the audience? If cultural context is a determinant of speaker effectiveness, we and our students should know about it!

Miami, Florida is an ideal location for intercultural communication research because of its large Latin-American population and its proximity to the Bahama Islands. This study compared data across the three largest distinct cultural groups represented in the region: Bahamian, Latin-American and Anglo.

The study was exploratory and not hypothesis-testing. Its purpose was to determine if culture has an effect on perceived speaker effectiveness.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were students in the introductory speech communication courses at the University of Miami, and in a variety of courses in the Republic of the Bahamas. Approximately 600 students were available for data collection. Any student who had participated in a public speaking course was eliminated from the analysis of the data. This limitation resulted in 344 subjects being available for data analysis.

Procedure

An eighty-item questionnaire was administered during an early meeting of each class. Subjects were given the following instructions:

> "Imagine that you are a member of an audience that has just heard a speech delivered by an excellent speaker--the best speaker you have ever heard. Please evaluate this 'best imagined speaker' by responding to the following questions."

Following the administration of the questionnaire, all subjects were debriefed concerning the purpose of the study.

Measurement

The questionnaire consisted of forty-five seven-point, Likert-type items designed to assess the source credibility of the "best imagined speaker," as well as an additional thirty-five items designed by the authors to assess a variety of content and delivery variables deemed important to effective public speaking style. Demographic data on the subjects was also collected.

The forty-five items used to assess source credibility were items designed by Tolhuizen (1977), and utilized by Watson (1978) and Arthur (1979). This measure includes five subscales found to successfully assess five dimensions of source credibility: competence, trustworthiness, dynamism, association, and objectivity.

The thirty-five items assessing speech content and delivery were designed by the authors to assess five general factors: speech organization, speech content, vocal qualities, nonverbal aspects of delivery, and speaker attitude toward audience and speaking situation.

Demographic items included information on the subjects' ethnic background/nationality, year in school, length of time in the U.S. (if appropriate), number of public speaking courses taken (if any), age, and sex.

Data Analysis

An exploratory study of this nature and the resultant data lead to several forms of data analysis. Factor analysis of the source credibility and speaker perception items was necessary in order to determine the dimensions along which the respondents were evaluating their "best imagined speaker." The results of these factor analyses allowed the authors to develop scales for these to compute scale dimensions and scores on each dimension for each respondent. These scale scores were then used to compare the perceptions of the "best imagined speaker" among the three ethnic groups (Anglo, Latin, and Bahamian).

Once these scales were developed and scale scores computed, an analysis of variance and appropriate T-tests were performed in order to examine the differences in speaker perceptions exhibited by the respondents among the three ethnic groups.

RESULTS

Factor Analyses

The factor analysis of the forty-five source credibility items indicated that the items did indeed measure five factors of source credibility (see Table I). An item was selected for inclusion in a factor if the loading on the primary factor was at least .50, and loadings on other factors for that item were .40 or less. As Table I indicates, eight items were included in Factor 1 (Trustworthiness), nine items were included in Factor 2 (Competence), four items in Factor 3 (Dynamism), four items in Factor 4 (Objectivity), and three items in Factor 5 (Association). Reliability tests for each scale were then administered using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha for the five source credibility scales were as follows: Trustworthiness; .896; Competence, .879; Dynamism, .756; Objectivity, .730; Association, .804.

The factor analysis of the thirty-five speaker perception items indicated that the respondents evaluated the "best imagined speaker's" speech content and delivery in terms of four factors rather than the five designed by the authors (see Table II). Because these thirty-five items were designed for this study and had not been used previously, an item was selected for inclusion in a scale if the loading for an item on the

TABLE I

VARIMAX ROTATED FACTOR PATTERN MATRIX

FOR SOURCE CREDIBILITY ITEMS

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
I believe the speaker to be a likeable person.	.56	.08	.28	.23	.10
..respectable	.62	.32	.22	.16	.11
...friendly	.71	.13	.16	.25	.07
...trustworthy	.69	.18	.11	.34	.18
...dependable	.52	.27	.21	.17	.12
...honest	.65	.25	.00	.30	.20
...sincere	.59	.29	.01	.26	.24
...personable	.54	.31	.17	.06	.23
...expert on topic	.06	.50	.04	.11	.05
...trained	.03	.51	.22	.18	-.01
...capable	.39	.60	.17	.08	.11
...qualified	.31	.67	.16	.07	.07
...experienced	.16	.67	.26	.13	.02
...able	.37	.52	.30	.08	.15
...competent	.40	.57	.22	.08	.10
...informed	.24	.64	.11	.05	.22
...skilled	.29	.61	.20	.08	.09
...aggressive	.08	.01	.52	-.05	.11
...powerful	.24	.19	.69	.11	.05
...forceful	.05	.25	.58	-.02	.09
...strong	.35	.38	.54	.15	.07
...unbiased	.20	.05	-.01	.70	.06
...unopinionated	-.01	-.14	-.01	.52	.01
...unprejudiced	.33	.13	.04	.62	.03
...impartial	.11	.15	-.03	.53	.04
...feel identification w/speaker	.11	.03	.21	.14	.67
...feel association w/speaker	.18	.08	.26	.14	.78
...feel comradeship w/speaker	.35	.18	.13	.17	.50

TABLE II
VARIMAX ROTATED FACTOR PATTERN MATRIX
FOR SPEAKER PERCEPTION ITEMS

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
I believe the speaker used examples, anecdotes, illustrations, and facts that were appropriate for his/her audience.	.40	.06	.24	.19
...moved smoothly from point to point	.40	.30	.12	.24
...points well-documented	.59	.16	.09	.08
...organization easy to follow and understand	.67	.16	.13	.22
...genuinely concerned about topic	.50	.14	.26	.10
...clear, logical pattern of organ.	.59	.26	.03	.21
...well-prepared	.51	.20	.15	.30
...conclusion tied speech together	.64	.23	.08	.25
...appropriate for occasion	.53	.19	.26	.24
...clearly-stated purpose	.65	.23	.15	.13
...supported main points	.65	.14	.14	.12
...felt positively toward audience	.50	.19	.40	.11
...spoke clearly & good diction	.59	.29	.15	.28
...good use of examples	.66	.13	.30	.11
...alert & erect posture	.09	.55	-.04	.09
...rich, authoritative voice	.16	.42	.11	.12
...well-dressed & groomed	.17	.60	.15	.11
...poised	.30	.48	.21	.17
...held position behind lectern	.13	.37	-.06	-.15

TABLE II (continued)
VARIMAX ROTATED FACTOR PATTERN MATRIX
FOR SPEAKER PERCEPTION ITEMS

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
...good use of humor	.17	.07	.41	.12
...used a variety of facial expressions	.25	.21	.47	.21
...used many hand gestures	.02	-.02	.36	-.06
...voice lacks variety in pace, pitch, & volume	.12	.01	.16	.46
...spoke very softly	.15	.06	-.03	.37
...spoke very rapidly	.12	.07	-.15	.50
...remained aloof & apart	.17	.05	.21	.57

primary factor was at least .35, and the loadings for that item on factors were .30 or less. These standards are admittedly low. The results seem to indicate that further refinement of these scales is in order. As Table II indicates, fourteen items were included in Factor 1 (Content & Orgnaization), five items in Factor 2 (Speaker Formality), three items in Factor 3 (Speaker Showmanship), and four items in Factor 4 (Listenability). Reliability tests, again using Cronbach's alpha, were performed. Cronbach's alpha for the four speaker perception scales were as follows: Content & Organization, .907; Speaker Formality, .642; Speaker Showmanship, .446; Listenablility, .583. These results again indicate that further development of the speaker perception scales are in order.

Analysis of Variance

No significant differences were found among ethnic groups on six of the nine scales developed for the study: Dynamism (Anglo, $\bar{X}$=20.58; Latins, $\bar{X}$=19.73; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=20.69; F=1.18; df=2,338; $p>.10$); Association (Anglo, $\bar{X}$=16.21; Latins, $\bar{X}$=16.00; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=16.22; F=.14; df=2,344; $p>.10$); Content & Organization (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=85.48; Latins, $\bar{X}$=86.32; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=86.74; F=.69; df=2,331; $p>.10$); Speaker Formality (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=28.26; Latins, $\bar{X}$=28.28; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=28.03; F=.09; df=2,335; $p>.10$); Speaker Showmanship (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=17.00; Latins, $\bar{X}$=16.62; Bahaminas, $\bar{X}$=16.31; F=2.15; df=2,340; $p>.10$); Listenability (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=21.73; Latins, $\bar{X}$=21.43; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=22.14; F=.62; df=2,344; $p>.10$). Significant differences were found, however, among the three ethnic groups on the remaining three scales: Trustworthiness (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=43.33; Latins, $\bar{X}$=44.32; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=45.43; F=2.64; df=2,337; $p=.07$); Competence (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=51.55; Latins,

$\bar{X}$=52.47; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=53.67; F=2.82; df=2,338; p=.06); Objectivity (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=16.58; Latins, $\bar{X}$=16.53; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=18.98; F=7.81; df=2,332; p=0005). T-tests were then performed on all pairwise comparisons among ethnic groups on these three scales.

The results of these tests showed some significant differences between Anglos and Bahamians in three cases, and between Latins and Bahamians in one case. The differences between the Anglos and the Bahamians were on the source credibility dimensions of Trustworthiness (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=43.33; Bahmians, $\bar{X}$=45.43; t=2.23; df=101.1; p=.02); Competence (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=51.55; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=53.67; t=-2.33; df=100.3; p=.02); and Objectivity (Anglos, $\bar{X}$=16.58; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=18.98; t=-3.83; df=112.7; p=005). The difference between the Latins and the Bahamians was on the Objectivity dimension of source credibility (Latins, $\bar{X}$=16.53; Bahamians, $\bar{X}$=18.98; t=-3.22; df=122.8; p=.001). All other pairwise comparisons were found to be nonsignificant.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine whether there are cultural differences in audience perceptions of effective public speaking and if so, to begin an exploration into the nature of those differences. More specifically, the study compared perceptions of speaker effectiveness across three cultures -- Anglo, Latin-American and Bahamian -- along five dimensions of source credibility and four dimensions of speaker perception. Results indicate that there are clearly cultural differences in attitudes toward speaker effectiveness. The nature of those differences is less clear and demands further investigation.

Results from the speaker perception scales developed for this study suggest that further refinement on the scales is necessary before they may be used as a valid measure.

As reported in the preceding section, Bahamian mean scores along the "trustworthiness" dimension of source credibility were significantly higher than Anglo mean scores with the mean for the Latin group falling between the two. Differences between Latins and Anglos and Latins and Bahamians were statistically insignificant. This would suggest a stronger value placed by Bahamians on such speaker characteristics as dependability, respectability, firm character, etc.

On the "competence" dimension of source credibility (expertise, training, capability, qualification, experience, ability, competence, informed, skilled) Bahamians again placed a significantly higher value than did Anglos, with Latins falling between the two. Differences between Latins and Anglos and Latins and Bahamians were insignificant.

On the "objectivity" dimension of source crdibility mean scores for Latins and Anglos were nearly identical. However differences between Bahamians and the other two groups were strongly significant with Bahamians placing a much stronger value on a speaker's objectivity. This finding suggests some support for the authors' initial observations that Bahamian students seem to shun the personal involvement advocated in public speaking textbooks.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary conclusion to be drawn from the present study is that the speaker perception scales need further refinement. The relative lack of clear-cut factors and the low Cronbach's alpha for all but the "Content and Organization" scale seem to indicate that the items developed by the authors do not adequately define independent dimensions of how people evaluate a speaker's content and delivery. Development of these scales is vital to the success of further research in this area.

The second (and somewhat surprising) conclusion to be drawn from the present study is that Anglos and Latins exhibit essentially the same expectations of a public speaker. There were no significant differences between the perceptions of the "best imagined speaker" of the Anglo and Latin respondents. Perhaps, upon closer scrutiny of the Latin sample, this similarity is not so surprising.

The mean age of the Latin respondents in this study was 19.5 years, with a standard deviation of 1.9 years. The Latin sample was essentially the college sophomore. The mean years of residence in the United States for this Latin sample was 14.6 years, with a standard deviation of 6.02 years. Over eighty percent of the Latin respondents have spent eleven or more years residing in the United States. Given these figures, it is not difficult to understand why the Anglo and Latin respondents perceived their "best imagined speakers" in such similar ways. The Latin subjects in the present study have spent most of their communicating lives living in the U.S. Evidently the acculturation process is strongly determining

the development of expectations of communication effectiveness, at least in the public speaking domain. Even without a public speaking course, these Latin students have adopted American standards of public speaking performance.

Several useful conclusions might be drawn from the data analyses from the present study. Regardless of culture, a speaker should attempt to be dynamic in his/her delivery and to develop some feeling of association and identification between him/herself and his/her audience members. In addition, speakers should attempt to plan their speeches well, with a well-organized and easy-to-follow pattern of organization. Adequate, varied, and well-documented support material is expected, and the speaker should show the audience that she/he is genuinely concerned about the topic and the audience. Although the conclusions to be drawn from the other three dimensions of speaker perception (formality, showmanship, and listenability) are more tentative in terms of the present study, the indications are that a public speaker should use gestures, facial expression, humor, voice, and pace of delivery effectively. That there are differing expectations among cultures on the use of these techniques is not evidenced by the present study. But through the further refinement of the speaker perception scales, hopefully any cultural differences in these dimensions of speaking content and delivery may soon be discovered.

The differences found between speaker expectations for Anglos/Latins and Bahaminas on the Trustworthiness, Competence, and Objectivity dimensions of source credibility have some important implications for the pedagogy of public speaking in the Bahamas, and possibly in other cultures, as

well. As Oliver (1974) stated, "since different societies cherish different values, speakers will generally seem to have a greater depth of meaning to listeners (and readers) of their own culture groups" (p. 104). This seems to be true of the Bahamian culture. The values cherisehd by Bahamians regarding their expectations of public speakers include speaker trustworthiness, competence, and objectivity, at a higher level than expected by Anglo and Latin audience members. These characteristics of a public speaker, then, need to be emphasized by teachers of public speaking in the Bahamian culture. Since these expectations exist in the Bahamian culture, teachers of public speaking should encourage and teach public speakers in the Bahamas to be not only well-organized and well-prepared, but also to exhibit a high level of trustworthiness, competence, and objectivity in the preparation and delivery of public speeches.

A final point for contemplation: Granted--the speaker perception scales need further development and refinement. Given this limitation, another shortcoming of the present study might be of importance. The target speaker of a "best imagined speaker" may not be the most legitimate target speaker for a study of this type, especially since the respondents had not had a public speaking course. If we can assume that a course in public speaking <u>at least</u> raises an awareness of the characteristics and techniques of an effective public speaker, then we might assume that evaluations of one or more live or recorded public speakers during or following a public speaking course would furnish a more immediate and productive target in terms of which to examine perceptions of public speaking effectiveness. We believe that it makes sense that, even

before a public speaking course, a live or recorded public speaker would be a more immediate target speaker to evaluate in relation to an audience member's expectations of what effective public speaking practice is. With this live or recorded speaker in mind, respondents could have some performance in mind in order to compare their expectations with the actual performance they had just witnessed. This limitation directs some attention toward ideas for further research.

SUMMARY

This study can serve as a starting point for further research in this area. Teaching public speaking to students in different cultures needs to be examined in order to effectively meet the needs of our students in the classroom. With further development and refinement of the speaker perception scales, and continued research in various cultures and subcultures, hopefully we can more adequately meet the communication needs of our students.

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